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CASTOR-BEAN PRODUCTION IN DAHOMEY

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The castor-oil plant is cultivated in Dahomey only when market conditions are favorable, particularly in the circles of Abomey, Savalov, and Athieme. Although the soil and climate of Dahomey are favorable to the cultivation of this crop [except in the north, where the soil is sandy], producers are weary of cultivating the castor-oil plant because of the fluctuating French demand and the producers' experience of numerous broken promises on the part of prospective buyers, together with setbacks suffered in the past. [Since 1930, France has been Dahomey's only castor-bean consumer]

Dahomey's total sales of castor beans in recent years have been as follows (in tons):

Season	Amount
1946 - 1947	1,076
1947 - 1948	1,139
1948 - 1949	1,800
1949 - 1950	911
1950 - 1951	571

In 1951 - 1952, the castor-bean trading period opened on 1 December 1951, and by 30 June 1952 the sales amounted to 782 tons.

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Exports from 1948 to 1951 were as follows (in tons):

<u>Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1948	992
1949	2,270
1950	668
1951	777*

* Valued at 40,766,000 francs

During the first half of 1952, 734 tons were exported, as compared with 399 during the corresponding period of 1951.

In economic circles of Cotonou, it is emphasized that, since May 1952, there has been a drop in prices, which, during the first 4 months of 1952, had been maintained at from 23,000 to 25,000 francs [per ton?]. From May on, transactions have been made on the basis of 15,000 francs at Savolou and from 14,000 to 17,000 francs at Athieme. Repercussions of the price drop were immediate in subsequent trading: only 11 tons were sold in June.

This decline in prices in Dahomey appears to be more accentuated at the point of production than it is in the CIF quotations.

The future of the castor-oil plant in Dahomey, however, appears very encouraging, for recent discoveries of the chemical industry now open new outlets for it. Thus, castor-oil-plant cultivation should soon become part of a large industry. For instance, the Pechiney group's Organico Company of France (which is currently building a plastic products factory in a Marseille suburb) would as of now be interested in buying the entire castor-bean output of the French Union. However, the variety now cultivated in Dahomey, the perennial "zanzibarensis," which grows very large and produces large beans, but in limited quantities, lends itself poorly to industrial cultivation. Consequently, it would be advisable to replace this variety with annuals having a more plentiful, less scattered yield.

Studies in this direction have been undertaken at the IRHO (Institut de Recherche pour les Huiles de Palme et les Oleagineux, Palm Oil and Oleaginous Plant Products Institute) at Pobe by a specialist in castor-oil-plant genetics. Demonstration fields in the main regions of production are in prospect, beginning with the 1953 season.

Local economic circles point out that precise commitments should be obtained in advance from the Organico Company or from any other group interested in the industrialization of the castor-oil plant.

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